

BOOK REVIEWS

***International Democracy Assistance for Peacebuilding: Cambodia and Beyond.* By Sorpong Peou. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Hardcover: 261pp.**

***Dancing in Shadows: Sihanouk, The Khmer Rouge, and the United Nations in Cambodia.* By Benny Widyono. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. Softcover: 321pp.**

Recent studies of Cambodia centre on the Khmer Rouge period, but both books under review cover the more recent period of Cambodia's democratic experiment during and after the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) sponsored elections of 1993. Both are written by two eminently qualified individuals: a seasoned peacekeeper and international bureaucrat originally from Indonesia — Benny Widyono — and a Cambodian-Canadian scholar of post-conflict peacebuilding and democratization — Sorpong Peou.

To be sure, Widyono's and Peou's books fall under different genres: the former is a vivid autobiographical narrative while the latter is a study teeming with erudition. But they each represent valuable contributions to the body of knowledge on post-conflict Cambodia, as well as the practice and theory of peacebuilding and democratization. Combining them both in a single book review is a challenge to say the least. Suffice it to say that Widyono's writing could use the precision and clarity of a more scholarly and rigorous methodological style, while Peou's work could, at times, be livened-up a bit with a more personal narrative style. Widyono's book is engrossing — though riddled with annoying erratas — while Peou's first three chapters (contained in Part 1: The Analytical Framework) are outstanding in terms of reviewing the scholarly literature and establishing a conceptual framework.

Peou introduces the concept of Complex Realist Institutionalism (CRI). While I am uncertain as to the utility of the concept, the literature review is exceptional as is the structured analysis across three levels: the state, the political arena and civil society. Does Peou deliver? For the most part, he certainly does: it is a work of great attention to detail, and one which can hardly be faulted. My only critique would be that for someone with so much direct experience of Cambodia, Peou's chapters in which he presents evidence in support of CRI, seem second-hand and bogged down by minutia.

Moreover, some of Peou's claims go unreferenced (as for example on p. 107 regarding several royalist ministers conducting secret negotiations with Hun Sen), and his reliance on *Khmer Intelligence* (11 endnote citations) a website and e-mail service of dubious provenance that he warns us about on p. 44. Methodologically, he uses "democratic consolidation as the dependent variable, institutionalization as both an independent and a dependent variable, structural factors as the main independent variables, and international democracy assistance as the intervening variable" (p. 45). Using institutionalization as both independent and dependent variables would seem to introduce *a priori* endogeneity into the model from a conceptual standpoint.

Twain's original dictum, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics" appears appropriately enough (p. 41) in Peou's fierce defence of his methodological approach to his single-case rich description study of Cambodia's experience with international democracy assistance building. While he summarizes his methodology as both quantitative and qualitative, in fact it reflects far greater comfort in the qualitative realm. No-one would fault him for doing so, but it is initially off-putting — indeed almost defensive when he writes "Even behaviourists who take pride in scientific inquiries do not always rely exclusively on quantitative data" (Endnote 21, p. 220). There is clearly a place for both, and often times, one complements the other as when many countries are statistically analyzed and the results of which guide the choice of case studies of the type Peou does, so as to avoid selecting on the dependent variable (democratic consolidation in this case).

Speaking of documentation, Peou's later chapters contained in Parts 1–5, are so mired in details that the reader can lose sight of the forest for the trees were it not for a succinct paragraph at the end of every chapter that summarizes the main findings. Nevertheless, Peou provides rich description of the recent developments in Cambodian politics beautifully, and excellent value-added for scholars interested

in explanations of “why international donors may succeed in putting war-torn countries on the path of democratic transition and negative peace, but fail to consolidate the gains they make” (p. 5). The answer is complicated, but meticulously and systematically laid out across more than a dozen chapters. There are limits, constraints and impediments to democratic consolidation, institutionalization and democracy assistance. Cambodia is a prime example of this.

In contrast, Widyono mangles quite a few names and, occasionally, facts. On p. 182, he mistakenly calls the Independence Monument the “Democracy Monument”, on p. 240, when he means to name Son Sen, a Khmer Rouge leader who, along with 13 members of his family, was allegedly mowed-down by a truck on Pol Pot’s orders, he names the late Son Sann, a leader of the non-Communist resistance and founder of the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front and its offshoot, the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party. On p. 282, Widyono writes that three international judges and two Cambodian judges serve on each panel of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (aka “The Khmer Rouge Trials”), yet the numbers are reversed — it is in fact two international judges vs. three Cambodian judges (with the requirement of a supermajority — one international judge must vote with the Cambodians for rulings to pass). The list goes on.

What is also left out is Widyono’s own involvement in resuscitating the Trials themselves when the UN announced that it would stop negotiations with Phnom Penh on 8 February 2002, a position that was reversed when Phnom Penh got the UN General Assembly (GA) to pass a Resolution on 21 November 2002 requesting that the Secretary General, Kofi Annan, resume negotiations. Widyono advised the Permanent Mission of Cambodia to the United Nations in 2002 and should take credit for this. As has often been said, “success has many fathers, while failure is an orphan”. Perhaps the jury (or the paternity test) is still out or the father is uncertain of whether his child is a prodigy or an *enfant terrible*? In any case, it is no secret that Phnom Penh lorded over its Permanent Mission regarding the GA Resolution. Another interesting angle is Widyono’s own Indonesian background, which brought to bear the parallels of GOLKAR with the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). While he mentions Prime Minister Hun Sen confiding in him that GOLKAR (and UMNO in Malaysia) were models for the CPP (pp. 146–7), it may well have as much to do with Widyono’s own vision for Cambodia in 1996 (one which he shared with me) in which he spoke approvingly of a GOLKAR model for Cambodia.

A colleague of mine, Colonel Ty Seidule (US Army), is fond of adapting Twain's earlier mentioned aphorism into: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and Generals' memoirs". While Widyono was no generalissimo, as "Shadow Governor" in Siem Reap during UNTAC and later as the UN Secretary General's Representative to Cambodia from 1994–97, he saw more than most, and his memoirs — which he himself admits required debate on "how frank I should be when describing people I had contact with in Cambodia" (p. xxviii) — is an honest and valuable rendition of five years in Cambodia at a time of maximum democratic hope for the country. If nothing else, it is a nuanced settling of accounts ("A Personal Note"; p. 249). This is the stuff of which memoirs are made — and worth reading!

Both Widyono's and Peou's books dovetail on the general period of governing Cambodia during and after UNTAC, and are important contributions for any scholar interested in the country, peacebuilding, democratization and its discontents.

SOPHAL EAR is an Assistant Professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, USA.